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ABSTRACT

Cycles of educational reform initiatives and their effects on practice are reviewed in this paper, which focuses on the relationship between state and federal policy and local practices. The first part discusses the first generation of reform that began with the passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Such reforms were generally redistributive and categorical, resulting in changes in the context of educational practice and in a separation between governance and instruction. Second-generation reform policies, which featured the states, are discussed next. The two waves within this second era focused on state regulation of instruction and practice and on issues of professionalism and local responses, respectively. Different objectives, notions of the "problem," assumptions about policy solutions, and social/political contexts characterize each generation of educational policy. A conclusion is that the complexity of teaching practice prevents generalized, consistent change by policy. (31 references) (LMI)

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December 1990

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EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

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Education has been a significant state and federal policy concern for only a little more than thirty years. The relationship between educational policy and practice, until approximately the mid-1960's, involved primarily the relationship between the rules and guidelines developed at local level by school boards and administrators and the responses of teachers and students to those local arrangements. State departments of education were sleepy bureaucratic backwaters and federal education policy [to the extent that it existed at all] kept at careful remove from local educational affairs.

The 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), with its support for compensatory education, innovation, strengthened state departments of education, libraries and, subsequently, bilingual education, signaled the substantive involvement of the federal government in local educational activities. These and kindred federal education initiatives comprised the <u>first generation</u> of policies intended to reform local practice.

The <u>second generation</u> of policies featured the states. States became consequential actors in the educational policy arena when the centralizing forces of property tax revolt and

school finance reform moved school financing from the local to the state level, and the New Federalism of the early 1980's decentralized significant components of federal education policy to the states. This extraordinarily active phase of education policy making comprises the second generation of educational reform in which new actors and issues emerged in the education policy arena. Analysts distinguish two "waves" of reform within this period of policy making: Wave One involved the states in devising and revising tighter standards for instruction and practice; Wave Two focused on issues of professionalism and local responses to these standards.

Different objectives, notions of "the problem," and assumptions about policy solutions characterize each generation of educational policy. Each round of reform also reflects changed social and political contexts as well as learning from past experience. This chapter reviews these cycles of educational reform initiatives and their effects on practice. My objective is to identify lessons and conclusions about the relationship between state and federal policy and local practices. The policies considered here are not presented as inclusive but as representative of the concerns, strategies, and consequences associated with each phase of educational policy.

The First Generation of Reform: 1965-1980

The federal education efforts which formed the keystone of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program constituted a fundamental shift in the character of the education policy arena and launched the first generation of education policies aimed at changing local educational practices.

Prominent among first generation policies is the 1965 ESEA, with its joint focus on enhancing educational opportunities for disadvantaged youngsters through Title I, as well as general quality of educational services through Title III (subsequently Title IV-C). Title I was based in the premise that educationally disadvantaged youngsters could be better served by special additional attention and resources. The program called for the federal government to distribute a large amount of money--beginning with $1 billion per year in 1965 to more than $2 billion a year by 1980--to localities based on the incidence of poverty. The funds then would be used to develop compensatory services to supplement the education of disadvantaged youngsters. During the 1970's and 1980's, Title I accounted for nearly half of the federal government's direct funding for elementary and secondary education (Peterson, Rabe & Wong, 1986: 49). Reformers expected that ESEA Title I would enhance the academic achievement of disadvantaged youngsters and thus redistribute social and economic opportunities in society. They also understood that Title I "called for performance that was probably beyond the

existing capacity of most...local educational agencies" (Bailey & Mosher, 1968: 51).

The redistributive and programmatic aims of reformers were not shared universally by members of Congress, many of whom saw Title I as a new strategy of general federal assistance to public education (Murphy, 1973). Further, local districts were under constant pressure to define legitimate uses of Title I as broadly as possible. Consequently, federal reformers relied on regulation as their main tool for assuring compliance with programs' purposes, and the federal interest in Title I became defined increasingly in terms of oversight (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1978:24-25).

Title III, in contrast with Title I's restricted dollars, comprised the primary "risk capital" in the system; federal funds supported grants to states and localities to stimulate innovative educational practices. Planners hoped that Title III would enable local educators and colleagues at the state level to undertake projects they could not have supported with their own resources. The result, reformers expected, would be a welling-up of grassroots creativity and talent that would change fundamentally the quality of American education for all youngsters (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988:20-24). Throughout the period of 1965-1981 (when the program became consolidated as Chapter 2 of the 1981 Education Consolidation and Improvement Act), Title III/IV-C funded thousands of local projects by means of a state-administered competitive grants program. Locally

proposed and developed projects ran the gamut from efforts to enhance academic content, to staff development, to efforts to augment the academic curriculum with such activities as art, music, or community-based science projects. Project grants ranged from the modest amount of about $10,000 to large district-wide initiatives funded at several hundred thousand dollars.

First generation policies generally were categorical, targeted for specific categories of services and populations thought to be served poorly by the schools. And though framed in categorical terms, these first generation initiatives generally were concerned with broad social purposes and values, most especially equity (James & Tyack, 1983).

First generation policies accordingly were generally redistributive, designed to counter perceived imbalances or inequities in existing allocations of local resources for education, and targeted low-income or other especially needy groups in the community. Included in program rules and regulations were evaluation and oversight provisions intended to insure that federal categorical dollars were spent for intended purposes. They also were primarily based on the assumption that local practitioners knew what to do, but lacked the motivation or the resources to provide the services deemed important by federal policy makers.

The Consequences of First Generation Reform Policies

The operation and consequences of Title I and Title III illustrate the relationships between first generation policies and practice. Early assessments of these ambitious programs yielded conclusions that were almost entirely disappointing. Evaluators concluded that the flagship federal compensatory education effort, ESEA Title I, was falling short of expectations; educationally disadvantaged youngsters remained for the most part disadvantaged and where gains were seen, they typically were not sustained (Kaestle & Smith, 1982). For example, a 1972 nationwide study found no significant differences between Title I students and comparable students not participating in the program; another study done in the late 1970's showed positive effects that were "detectable" but "not large" (Peterson, 1983; Kaestle & Smith, 1982). Taken together, the general conclusion of first round Title I evaluations was that the effects of compensatory education programs varied so widely from place to place that, on average, they did not have a general impact substantial enough to be measured (Peterson, 1983:100; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1978:26-27).

Local Title III/IV-C support for locally developed innovation also failed to make a systematic difference in practice, analysts concluded. Successful local innovations were few; the majority of those that accomplished their objectives failed to continue once special Title III project funds were withdrawn (Berman and McLaughlin, 1974-1978). Despite the

program's local popularity, the effectiveness of Title III/IV-C in achieving its objective of promoting and sustaining effective new practices was difficult to define and document. Researchers concluded that federal Title III program funds exercised limited leverage on the course of innovations or sustained improvements in practice because they were unable to influence those factors most essential to effective implementation--the motivations of actors within the district setting and the locally designed implementation strategies.

Assessments of policy effects on local practices within approximately the first ten years, in short, gave reformers little to celebrate. Later evaluations of both programs were somewhat more encouraging. The last major evaluation of Title I, now ECIA Chapter 1, found examples of effective compensatory education programs and documented positive benefits for participating youngsters (Kennedy, Birman & Demaline, 1986). However, this research also found that these gains did not move participating children closer to the achievement levels of more advantaged students, and that gains typically were not sustained either over summers or once program services were discontinued.

A nationwide study of the next round of efforts to support local innovation reached more generally encouraging conclusions about the ability of external agents and policies to stimulate and enable local change efforts (Crandall & Loucks, 1984). This analysis demonstrated that reformers at all levels of government had developed more effective strategies in support of

organizational change as a result of initial, disappointing efforts. Program developers worked with local implementors to carry out projects that were faithful to the parameters of program design and also responsive to local conditions. Policies supported local staff in the acquisition of the capacity and expertise required to carry out planned change projects.

These later evaluations highlight the developmental nature of the relationship between policy and practice: it takes time to develop, implement, and institutionalize local practices consistent with policy goals. But despite these instances of the positive effects of policy on practice, there is still little persuasive evidence that these state and federal programs have had a dramatic, generalized effect on practice or on the quality of instruction (Cohen, 1990). The highly variable responses at district, school, and classroom levels underscore the limits of categorical programs, embedded as they are in larger system of relationships, priorities, and capacity. Such efforts, analysts conclude, can have only marginal significance for practice (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Cohen, 1990).

Further, the first generation of education reform efforts showed that policy can't mandate what matters and that there is no 1:1 relationship between policy and practice. Policy makers must rely on actors at other levels of government or in different institutional settings to interpret, act on, and support policy goals and strategies. Local response turns on local capacity and will, factors generally beyond the reach of policy. Title I and

Title III both generated enormous diversity in local responses, diversity that reflected local willingness and ability to respond. The positive effects associated with these policies seen at the local level reflect to an important degree the evolution and development of that local capacity and will.

First generation policies affected practice in other, less apparent ways. First generation policies stimulated significant change in the context of educational practice as the system responded to the policy requirements and environment associated with first generation policies. First generation policies created new institutional forms--categorical programs; new organization responsibilities--program development and accountability; and consequential new actors in the educational policy arena--state departments of education and local program offices. All of these system responses had consequences for practice.

Some of them were positive. For example, to get Title I funds, districts in the south desegregated at a faster rate in the five years following the passage of ESEA than any other part of the country has before or since (Hill, 1977). First generation policies are primarily responsible for the development of evaluation capacity at state and local levels. After initial complaint and resistance, practitioners at both state and local levels generally have come to value the evaluation activities initiated in response to first generation policy mandates.

Not all systemic effects were positive from practitioners'

perspective, however. The new agencies and authorities created by first generation policies fragmented the policy system and teachers' control over classroom practice. This separation of governance and instruction increased administrative overhead and the general costs of getting things done, as well as the size of the bureaucracies responsible for administration and oversight (see Cohen, 1990).

These first generation policy effects not only changed the broader policy system in consequential ways, but the structures they established and the lessons they generated about planned change in educational organizations set the stage for the second generation of reform efforts.

The Second Generation of Educational Reform: 1980-

The 1980's education policy making efforts were unprecedented in scope and volume. The second generation of education policy arose from a changed political culture and economic conditions. Ronald Reagan's New Federalism pushed responsibility and authority for educational policy making down to the states by eliminating many smaller federal education efforts and reducing the federal role in major federal programs. The Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) of 1981 swept categorical programs with limited political constituencies into Chapter 2 of ECIA; Title I of ESEA became ECIA Chapter 1. ECIA outlined increased roles for the states and greatly reduced federal responsibilities for evaluation, program support, and

funding. At the same time as states assumed responsibilities previously held at the federal level, they acquired obligations assigned formerly to local school districts as property tax revolts pushed responsibility for funding upwards to the state level.

Policy analysts distinguish two "waves" of reform within this second generation of education policy making. The first wave took place from approximately 1980 through 1985; the second wave began in about 1986.

Wave One: Toward excellence. The central focus of Wave One reform efforts was defined by actors new to the education policy arena. From influential national commissions (most notably the 1983 Commission on Excellence which produced the influential report A Nation at Risk) to active state business roundtables, the private sector figured prominently in designing the objectives of reform and the direction for changes, as well as enlisting the support of general government. The rallying point of second generation policies was excellence, as the business community concluded that the nation was losing its competitive edge. This analysis located both the source and the solution to the "rising tide of mediocrity" in the schools. What was required to reform education in this view were higher standards--higher standards for students, higher standards for teachers, higher standards for the curriculum.

The Reagan administration's emphasis on decentralizing responsibility to the states changed the federal role from the

substantive one of the 70's, to a symbolic "bully pulpit" function. States, often only junior partners in the first generation reforms, became major players. Both federal rhetoric and private sector located significant responsibility at the state level for establishing and monitoring strong standards for educational practice. With vigorous support from governors and legislators, virtually every state enacted state legislation in the areas of teacher policy and student policy between 1980 and 1985 (Firestone, Fuhrman and Kirst, 1989). Academic excellence and accountability were top priorities. The United States Education Department, in its response to the commission report, A Nation Responds, claimed that the commission findings had generated a "tidal wave of reform which promises to renew American education". Wave One policies, this document predicted, would have dramatic and powerful impact on educational practices throughout the country. Certainly these new policies aimed at the very heart of the educational enterprise; with these policies, state legislators reached into the technical core of schooling, a domain held formerly by local school boards.

Teacher policy. State policies about the way teachers are prepared, credentialed, supported, evaluated, and compensated constituted a central focus of educational policy making and reform agendas during the first half of the 1980's (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988). Policy makers worried both about declines in the quality of the teaching corps as well as impending teacher shortages. Responding to reports that some

teachers within the profession could not pass minimal tests of literacy or numeracy and that teachers entering the profession were among the least academically talented, unable to pass academic competency tests (Vance and Schlechty, 1983), legislators in almost every state defined stronger requirements for admissions to teacher preparation programs. Approximately 30 state legislatures raised requirements for entering the profession by specifying minimum grade point averages and requiring tests of academic ability.

Reports that the most academically talented teachers left the profession (Schlechty & Vance, 1981) generated strategies to attract and retain talented teachers. States instituted minimum salaries and salary schedules as well as performance-based compensation schemes as a way to reward good teaching and encourage talented teachers to remain in the profession. Merit pay and career ladders were debated in state capitals during the early 1980's, although only a few states implemented them on a large scale. Mentor Teacher programs represented another strategy to provide extra compensation to especially effective teachers while also providing additional, credible resources to classroom teachers. All together, more than 1000 pieces of state legislation concerning teachers were enacted by the mid-1980's.

Student policy and curriculum. State reform efforts also focused on the curriculum and standards of student accomplishment as response to demands for more a rigorous education and for a more uniform secondary school experience throughout the state

(McDonnell, 1988). In the area of curriculum policy, minimum standards were replaced by guidelines aimed at fostering educational excellence. Concerns about American's lagging global economic competitiveness triggered questions about the ability of the curriculum to prepare the workforce needed to maintain and improve the country's economic strength. Stiffer graduation standards, the reform most popular with state policy makers, mandated new graduation requirements that increased the mathematics, science, and language instruction required for all students. The new requirements reflected recommendations outlined in A Nation at Risk, which called for a more uniform curriculum focused on academic (rather than elective) subjects (Clune, 1989). Some states and districts went further to enhance this "academic excellence" objective by phasing out "lower level" courses such as consumer math, life science, or business English in an effort to upgrade course content.

New testing programs for students accompanied these teacher and curriculum policies in most states. As accountability for student progress and accomplishment moved to the state level, states mandated tests designed to measure the "outputs" of the state education system and to provide "indicators" of educational quality. More than 40 new state testing programs were initiated in the 1980's; the typical state installed a comprehensive testing program to assess student competency in most academic subjects at several grade levels as well as basic proficiency tests in the basic skills (Clune, 1989).

Wave Two: Toward professionalism. A second wave of education reform gathered in response to lessons from first generation policies about how schools change, and to demands from the education profession for more authority and control over classroom practices. Also, state level reformers acknowledged the necessary limits of Wave One reforms: New standards and curriculum would have only limited effectiveness unless the quality of teaching also improved. For example, the 1986 National Governors' Association report, A time for results, reiterated the governors' commitment to an improved system of public education, but acknowledged that state leaders had learned that "real excellence could not be imposed from a distance."

Consequently, around 1986, policy initiatives that shifted attention to issues of teacher professionalism took center stage. Like Wave One, both direction and the goals of Wave Two were defined by prestigious commissions' reports. This time, however, the reports reflected the views of the education profession. Groups such as the Holmes Group and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy provided critique of Wave One reforms and called for strategies that supported teachers' professionalism. Whereas teachers were seen as part of the problem in Wave One (insufficient quality, motivation, or standards of performance), Wave Two cast teachers as central to the "solution" of increased educational excellence and called for increased support for teachers' development and an increased role in decisions about classroom and school practices.

The touchstone of Wave Two was an enhanced teacher role in decisions that affect the school and classroom practice. State and local policies developed to that end: initiatives known either as "restructuring" or "site-based management" were crafted as a response to the "bureaucracy problem," and teachers' demands for greater professional control were supported (McDonnell, 1989). Whereas a key assumption in the blizzard of state level policies setting new standards and plans for accountability was that the education system did not require fundamental change, this second wave of reform in the mid-80's formed around the conviction that the policy relationships and structures in place curtailed significant reform because they constrained teachers' ability to exercise professional judgment in the classroom. The restructuring movement represented the first time reformers attempted to promote structural change in the education system through various strategies for decentralizing responsibility for decision making to the site level. This second wave of reform generated the catch phrase "teacher empowerment" and defined new roles for teachers and for administrators at school and district levels. Taken together with Wave One policies, these efforts represented accommodation of macro level concerns of uniformity and standards for excellence with micro level requests for enhanced professional discretion. Within the context of tighter curricula, tougher graduation requirements, and standards to promote teacher competence, restructuring initiatives gave

teachers more control over the details of classroom practice (see Darling-Hammond and Berry, 1988).

The Consequences of Second Generation Policies

The unprecedented level of state policy making activity during the first half of the 1980's was accompanied by high expectations and front page headlines. These state-level reforms by and large were highly visible, low cost efforts that were easy to monitor. Are graduation requirements stiffer? Are new curriculum standards on the books? Have district pay scales changed?

The answers to these questions generally are affirmative. Analysts agree that the state-level reforms promulgated during Wave One have prompted formal changes in the content and standards of local district practice (Clune, White and Patterson, 1989; Firestone, Fuhrman and Kirst, 1989; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990; Kirst, 1990, for example). Course taking patterns in high schools across the country have changed dramatically as a result of these reforms. There is more math and science in the curriculum, tougher graduation standards have pushed more low and middle achieving students into academic courses, and low level courses that do not qualify for college admission have been reduced or eliminated. Concurrently, elective courses, most especially the arts and music, as well as non-academic areas such as vocational education, have been squeezed out or severely curtailed.

New statewide testing mandates and accountability schemes have influenced school curricula and what is taught. Teachers in diverse settings say that they have changed instructional content and strategies in response to these new standards (Koretz, 1988; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). Analysts do not necessarily agree about the benefits of tougher testing policies. Some worry that new standards will actually make things worse as teachers revise otherwise successful practice to "teach to the test"; others say that teaching to the test may not be such a bad thing because it might actually represent an improvement on practice in some cases (Kirst, 1990).

These consequences of Wave One policies for practice were not uniform. Affluent schools and school districts generally were not significantly affected by Wave One reform. The new instructional and graduation standards typically were consistent with existing practice. But there was little resistance to reforms that required increasing academic content even among districts required to make substantial change. Indeed, much of the progress reported as a result of Wave One reforms resulted from district initiative and many districts used state policies to further their own preferences for the instructional program (Firestone, Fuhrman and Kirst, 1990). Analysts conclude that these state efforts to upgrade content and standards of instruction were a "qualified success because they produced the broad scale change of a type likely to make a difference in the ultimate policy goals" but that it is hard to say much now about

their effects on the actual content of classroom practice (Clune, White and Patterson, 1989).

These reforms in curriculum and student policy were relatively easy to implement. The more difficult reforms in the area of teacher policy--merit pay schemes, career ladders, teacher recruitment and certification, teacher evaluation--generally have been diluted, substantially modified, or abandoned. Teacher resistance and implementation difficulties derailed merit pay plans around the country; teacher demoralization and local complaints forced modification in schemes such as the Texas teacher test; Florida's incentive-pay initiative and master teacher programs were scuttled. The problems of collecting valid and reliable data about teacher performance without inflicting excessive costs on teachers and administrators has proven exceedingly difficult and remains one of the most intractable problems associated with the broad range of teacher policy (McDonnell, 1989). In general, efforts to enhance the quality of teaching through performance-based incentives or screens have proven difficult to implement or sustain politically. Some states (Florida, for example) moved away from performance incentives based in individual performance to school-based plans. Career ladder plans continue in a number of states and districts, but typically have been carefully distinguished from merit pay approaches. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's 1988 School and Staffing survey showed that approximately 300,000 of the nation's 2.2 million public

school teachers receive incentive pay through some kind of career ladder program. About 10 percent were receiving pay for additional responsibilities; less than 3 percent were receiving "merit" bonuses (Career Ladder Clearinghouse, 1990). The more straightforward, less controversial policies to boost teachers' salaries, in contrast, generally have resulted in higher pay for teachers, especially at the beginning level.

Visible, easy-to-implement aspects of Wave One reform, in short, appear to be in place. Questions remain unanswered about whether these changes are changes in "form not substance" and whether the ultimate goal of these policies--enhanced academic excellence--will result. Likewise, questions of impact remain unanswered about Wave Two restructuring efforts. While scarcely a district has been immune to calls from the profession or free of press from the policy community to reexamine the structure of education governance and decision making, it is premature to assess the consequences of district and school responses. "Restructuring" remains ill-defined and excluding some prominent exceptions, it is too early to tell what significance the restructuring movement will have on practice (David, 1990). Teachers report problems with new roles; many principals and district officials have difficulty with their redefined authority. Teachers assert that they are given new responsibility but insufficient authority or resources to act effectively. And the larger system itself impedes site-based decision making. For example, a school site council in Dade

County, a district cited as a "pioneer" of restructuring efforts, had to request more than 100 waivers from the older system (Kirst, 1990a).

Analysts comment that the functions "restructured" often have little to do with content or instruction and that teacher participation in many instances is largely symbolic (Clune & White, 1988). Further, commentators point out that many school-based management or restructuring schemes ignore the embedded character of schools and the importance of central roles as support for school level change and improvements in classroom practice (Cohen, 1990; McLaughlin, forthcoming). Nonetheless, at least one urban superintendent has remarked: "Things will never be the same; we can't go back to the way things were." The only conclusions that can be drawn now about restructuring reforms is that changes in the structure of the education system require an enormously complex, time-consuming process of mutually reinforcing, complementary action over a number of years (David, 1990). More time is needed before analysts can assess the extent to which second generation policies--higher standards for practice and greater teacher autonomy in meeting those goals--will improve the quality of American education in any systematic way.

However, past experience predicts the emergence of new "islands" of excellence as a result of these efforts, while overall, substantial systemic improvement in the quality of educational practice will elude second generation policy

reformers just as it did first generation policy makers. More than two decades of experience has shown that the practice of teaching is simply too complex, too embedded, and too dependent on individuals with varying capacities, attitudes, and values for policy to affect it in any generalized, consistent way. Policy clearly can influence practice for better or worse, but it does so only as one of many factors that comprise the context of teaching and learning.

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